

# Alberta Education

## Review of Services for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired

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### **Stakeholder Responses and Recommendations**

**December 28, 2007**



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Recommendation .....	2
Principle 1    Responsive Community Based Support .....	2
Recommendation .....	5
Principle 2    Collaboration and Partnerships .....	5
Recommendation .....	7
Principle 3    The Alberta Programs of Study must be accessible to all students .....	7
Recommendations .....	8
Principle 4    Equitable Access to Assistive Technology – Students Need individual assistive technology solutions to be successful .....	9
Recommendation .....	10
Principle 5    Accountability .....	12
Recommendations .....	13

## **Review of Services for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired Stakeholder Response and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The Minister of Education requested a review of the services for students who are blind or visually impaired in answer to concerns raised by stakeholders. The purpose of this review was to determine the long-term outcomes, measures and strategies for an enhanced service delivery model. The Learning Resources Centre (LRC), the Special Programs Branch and Learner Assessment of Alberta Education were involved in the organization and coordination of the review. Pamela Rannelli, Education Consultant for the Visually Impaired (REACH), was seconded to Alberta Education for one year as; Provincial Coordinator for Services for Students with Low Incidence Disabilities. This includes assisting in conducting this review and completing this stakeholder response and recommendation report.

The *Alberta Education Services for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired Workshop Discussion Guide for Education Stakeholder Input* (based on the issues identified by stakeholder groups and Alberta Education) was developed as a format to gather information, feedback and to help determine solutions that would enhance services and supports for these students. The six issues identified were:

- **Alberta's Service Delivery Models**
- **Building Awareness for the Classroom Teacher** in the educational needs of students who are blind or visually impaired.
- **Effective Use of Teaching Assistants** that work with students who are blind or visually impaired.
- **Assistive Technology Loaning Services**
- **Alternate Format Support Services**
- **Accountability**

The *Discussion Guide* with accompanying background information was provided to the following groups of stakeholders before the workshop:

- Alberta Home and School Councils' Association (AHSCA)
- Alberta School Boards Association
- Alberta Society for the Visually Impaired (ASVI)
- Alberta Teachers' Association (including teaching assistants)
- Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta
- Association of School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA)
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- College of Alberta School Superintendents (including special education directors)
- Federation of Francophone School Boards of Alberta
- Regional Educational Consulting Services (RECS)
- Vision Resource Centre chairs (Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge)

Stakeholders were invited to send representatives to participate in a full day workshop in Edmonton on November 28, 2007. Stakeholder organizations attending the workshop were also invited to submit written responses.

Organizations unable to attend the workshop were encouraged to provide written input through the *Discussion Guide*. The Special Education Advisory Committee received the *Discussion Guide*. Written input was received from ASBOA, AHSCA, ASVI, CNIB, parents, teaching assistants, vision consultants, vision teachers and some school boards (i.e., Calgary Board of Education's vision team and education assistants, Edmonton Catholic School District and Calgary Catholic Separate School District).

Input from the workshop and from the written feedback was used as the basis for this report and its recommendations. In reviewing the input, several themes or principles emerged that all stakeholders identified as being critical to providing appropriate education for students who are blind or visually impaired. The recommendations are based on those identified by stakeholders as solutions to enhance services and supports for these students. Consultation within the department has also occurred to determine if this report would interface with initiatives and work currently being undertaken.

### **Recommendation**

This report in its entirety should be available to stakeholders upon request.

### **Five Principles Providing For An Appropriate Education - Identified by Stakeholders**

Stakeholders identified the following five principles are critical to providing an appropriate education for these students. Each principle summarizes stakeholders input. Action outcomes and Alberta Education implications and recommendations then follow.

#### **Principle 1 Responsive Community Based Support**

The stakeholders clearly indicated that they would like to have supports closer to students in their own communities and that all students who are blind or visually impaired in the province need to have equal access to services and supports. Stakeholders felt that not one model of service delivery would meet the diverse needs of students who are blind or visually impaired, but students should have access to an array of services dependent on individual needs. The Vision Resource Centre Concept is well supported and stakeholders feel that this model needs to be resourced and made available across the province.

Stakeholders identified an immediate need to increase the number of trained vision professionals (orientation and mobility specialists/ teachers of the visually impaired). They also indicated that teacher assistants need to be supported and recognized for acquiring specialized skills such as braille transcription, assistive technology (AT) and adaptation of specialized materials. They also felt that locally authorized resources are not available in alternate formats in a timely manner or are non existent. Increased

support to the Vision Resource Centres would go a long way in meeting these identified needs.

### Option 1      The Vision Resource Centre Model

#### **Action Outcomes:**

- **Invite proposals from school districts to act as “host boards” for the administration of the Vision Resource Centres, (VRCs).**
- **Provide the existing VRCs (Alberta Education’s Field Services’ Zones 2/3; 5 and 6) with sustainable resources. Staff the VRCs with trained vision professionals and supports. Include in their staff, trained braille transcribers. These VRCs provide professional development and training for district personnel as well as work with students to support attainment of disability specific skills of the Expanded Core Curriculum. They would also begin to take over the production in alternate format of locally authorized resources.**
- **Develop VRCs in Zones 1 and 4.**
- **VRCs have partnership with multi disciplinary teams, (RECS).**
- **Have Field Services, Alberta Education in the Zones support and provide leadership to the VRCs.**
- **Support implementation of *the Essential Components for Programming for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired* through the work of the VRCs.**
- **Transition the present vision consultants under RECS to the VRCs teams.**

#### **Budget - Year One to Three:**

- **Base Budget would include:**
  - **Administration/leadership (1 FTE – \$100,000)**
  - **FTE Teacher of the Visually Impaired (1 FTE- \$100,000)**
  - **FTE Brailist (1 FTE - \$50,000)**
  - **FTE Orientation and Mobility Instructor (1 FTE-\$80,000)**
  - **Administration support (.5 FTE - \$30,000)**
  - **Technology support (paid to board -\$25,000)**

**Human Resource Costs: \$385,000.00**

- **Infrastructure:**
  - **Video conferencing technology (in-kind contribution from host board)**
  - **AT assessment and trial lab (\$85,000 – includes computers, software, CCTVs, braille embosser, manual and electronic brailers, scanner, computers with braille input/output, digital audio players, and other AT).**
  - **Office technology - \$30,000**
  - **Furniture - \$25,000**
  - **Space and Caretaking services (in kind contribution from board)**

**Infrastructure Costs: \$ 140,000.00**

**Total Cost of Each Year (For each VRC): \$525,000.00 x 5 VRCs =\$2,625,000.00.**

**Budget for 3 years: \$7,875,000.00.**

Option 2 School Authorities receive support to hire their own Vision Specialists (Teachers of the Visually Impaired/Orientation Mobility Instructors)

Stakeholders clearly identified the need for more trained teachers of the visually impaired/orientation and mobility instructors to provide support and to work more closely with students. Stakeholders in both discussion and written submissions expressed that a combination of direct and consultative service from these vision specialists should be available to all students. In several Alberta school districts, vision specialists are hired to provide students who are blind or visually impaired and their classroom teachers with support they require. This model is also extensively used in other provinces/regions across Canada (e.g., Ontario, British Columbia, Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan). The model is most cost effective when there are a higher number of students within one school district; however, neighbouring school districts with lower numbers of students have been known to share the cost of having a trained teacher of the visually impaired or orientation and mobility instructor to provide support to their students. Caseloads of teachers of the visually impaired are based on student need, severity of vision loss, as well as travel time required. Teachers/orientation and mobility instructors would provide direct or consultative support depending on the identified student needs.

Benefit: The capacity for supporting students with vision loss is built within school districts. Students who are blind or visually impaired and their teachers will have access to more direct service from a teacher of the visually impaired and/or orientation and mobility instructor as they require it. Some students, if receiving more support from a trained teacher of the visually impaired would not require as much support from a teaching assistant. Stakeholders identified that for some students, consultation, especially in conjunction with other specialists (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy; speech language therapy) as offered by RECS, was important to maintain.

Risk: Students who are blind or visually impaired are identified as a low incidence population, more rural school authorities typically report having a low number of these students enrolled. These school authorities may not see the need to hire a teacher for such a low number of students. They would need to enter into agreements with other school authorities to share costs. It is also challenging to recruit trained professionals to rural areas. It would be necessary to have a recruitment and bursary training program to attract and provide support for training professionals in these areas. Alberta Education would have to consider target funding for these positions on a long-term basis, for this to be maintained by the school authorities.

**Budget**

Given that there are approximately 15 teachers of the visually impaired hired in this capacity in Alberta; and, student registration number at the LRC is 646 students (December 2007) - average caseload of 20 students indicates a resource gap of at least 15 positions @ \$100,000.00 - \$1,500,000.00. To fund all:

- **Teacher of the Visually Impaired: 30 positions totals: \$3,000,000.00/year**
- **Orientation & Mobility Instructors: 10 positions@ \$80,000.00: \$800,000.00/year**

**Alberta Education Implication/Recommendations**

1. Options: Vision Resource Centres or school authorities hire own vision specialists  
If **Option 1** is considered. Presently, students in northern and central Alberta rural school boards (Zones 1 and 4), cannot access programs at the VRCs because of where they live in the province. Alberta Education's support for the existing three VRCs needs to be extended to all zones in recognition of equity and accessibility for these students. Establishing VRCs in every zone would interface and be linked to Alberta Education, Field Services and Special Programs. It could act as a model that holds the possibility of expansion to include the needs of other students in the districts with exceptional needs.

If **Option 2** is considered, school authorities would be supported in hiring their own vision specialists to increase supports and services for students. This would improve equitable access to trained vision specialists across Alberta. This model has been used successfully in larger school authorities, however, it does present challenges in districts with a lower number of students who are blind or visually impaired.

### **Recommendation**

Alberta Education supports equitable access to vision specialists in all zones.

2. The Learning Resources Centre's *Services for Students with Visual Impairments Policy* produces locally authorized resources as priority 4. Few locally authorized resources are produced (e.g., in braille format) in recognition of higher priorities (provincial exams and provincial authorized resources), staffing capabilities and budgetary constraints.

School authorities approving locally authorized materials need to be aware and cognizant that these materials will need to be developed in alternate format for all students to have access. Alberta Education's support for a braille transcriber in the VRCs can assist school authorities in ensuring that this happens. Thus the role and responsibility for providing locally authorized materials in alternate and accessible formats would transition to the school authorities.

### **Recommendation**

Alberta Education reviews the role of school authorities in the provision of alternate format materials for locally authorized materials.

## **Principle 2 Collaboration and Partnerships**

Although stakeholders indicated the importance of responsive community supports for students, they felt that it was important to grow coordinated and collaborative resources within the province. Given the diverse needs of these students, the fact that this is a low incidence population and the distance factors in rural Alberta, it is important that coordinated partnerships continue to be strengthened and developed. Working with other ministries, agencies and vendors to provide the linkages to enhance capacity is critical.

### **Action Outcomes:**

- **Build awareness and supports for the multi-disciplinary learning teams around low incidence disabilities.**

- **Create linkages with the Special Education Advisory Committee.**
- **Develop a website/ listserv that would be an inclusive resource for teachers, paraprofessionals/vision professionals/agencies/parents. This could be accomplished by providing a strand on the 2learn.ca website.**
- **Link with other ministries (e.g., Alberta Health and Wellness, and Alberta Children’s Services) to develop the concept of a traveling Low Vision Clinic.**
- **Provincial Coordination to build partnership with the consortia to provide provincial professional development opportunities.**
- **Recruit provincial specialist positions in the area of (curriculum support; assistive technology training and research; deaf/blind).**
- **Develop a recruitment and retention strategy for professional in this field.**
- **Develop mentorship program for professionals in the field.**
- **Provincial Coordination of the Vision Resource Centres.**
- **Redefine the role of the Vision Resource Network.**
- **Develop partnership with Alberta Advanced Education and Technology and post secondary institutions to increase training opportunities for teachers and teacher assistants.**
- **Build partnerships with other provinces to share expertise and be involved in national initiatives.**
- **This work could evolve into an Alberta Centre of Innovation that would improve linkages and provide leadership.**

**Budget - Year One**

- **FTE Provincial Coordinator Position (1 FTE – \$100,000.00)**
- **Professional development workshop and courses ( \$25,000.00)**
- **Bursary program to recruit professionals to the field (\$50,000.00)**
- **Research grants for outcome based research (\$25,000.00)**
- **Infrastructure and administrative support (\$50,000.00)**
- **Travel costs to connect with the field and national stakeholders (\$25,000.00)**

**Total Cost for Year One: \$275,000.00. This amount would need to grow with increase in years two and three as provincial specialists’ positions are filled.**

**Alberta Education Implication/Recommendation**

1. The provincial coordination work should be hosted by a school authority or other agency, to enable capacity building through partnerships and collaborations amongst the department, regional authorities, agencies, organizations and vendors. As students and children who are blind or visually impaired are identified as a low incidence disability group, school authorities, organizations and agencies cannot individually develop the specialized expertise to fully support these children. This direction is consistent with the *Services for Students and Children Policy* which recognizes the need to “work together” both at the provincial and local levels to minimize duplication of effort and improve access for, and responsiveness to children and families.

**Recommendation:**

Alberta Education supports a provincial representative through the one FTE Provincial Coordinator position to enable capacity building with other members of the community.

**Principle 3 The Alberta Programs of Study must be accessible to all students.**

One of the main issues identified by stakeholders was the lack of timely delivery of the present system to meet schools requests for Alberta Education authorized learning resources in alternate and accessible formats. The department has not supported FTE increase requests for the LRC for the last three years; this has greatly impacted on their ability to keep up with the demand for alternate format materials. If students who are blind or visually impaired are to be successful in completing the *Alberta Programs of Study*, it is essential that they have access to resources and material in braille, large print, e-text or audio formats at the same time as their sighted peers.

While the need exists for the capacity of local production of such materials, there is still an obvious and distinct role for provincial coordination and development of authorized resources. The collections of professional and student resources (educational learning kits; professional resource books; alternate format curriculum titles, etc.) needs to be housed at a central location for loaning across the province and this unit should act as a body that links with the other education jurisdiction resource centres across Canada (i.e. member of Canadian Association of Educational Resource Centres (CAER) established through CMEC). In the spring of 2007, the LRC Specialized Services reported to other CAER members that its total savings from CAER interlibrary loans was \$303,608.00. More specifically, savings totaled \$67,372.00 for large print, \$23,000 for audio, and \$212,992.00 for braille resources. Refer to the following link for information on CAER <http://www.previ.org/links/caer.html> . Production of alternate formats is considered when the resources are not available through loans or purchases.

The present location of this expertise in the LRC (responsible for the delivery of learning resources) lacks the ability to link alternate format production to the curriculum development stage as well as to decisions around learning resources. It would be ideal if the unit could be a part of learning and teaching resources so that it could be better incorporated into the work and decisions that are made at this level. Stakeholders also indicated that trained teachers of the visually impaired should be more involved in the decision-making process around purchases of disability specific curricula and learning materials.

**Action Outcomes:**

- **Interface with the Alberta Education's *Accessibility Resource Plan (2007)* presently underway. The goal is for all learning resources for students authorized or developed by the Ministry to be available in formats that meet the diverse learning needs of Alberta students.**
- **For timely accessibility of alternate format materials including appropriate accommodations, production should be housed within Learning and Teaching Resources or Curriculum branches of the department. The unit**

should link and work more closely with the Learner Assessment; the Curriculum; Learn Alberta areas.

- A budget allocation to recruit full time braille transcribers and other production specialists (e.g. audio) to enable alternate format production of all new provincially authorized resources.
- One FTE teacher of the visually impaired be on staff with the department to ensure that the work at the unit interfaces and is responsive to the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired.
- Alberta Education teacher of the visually impaired connects and meets with Learner Assessment and Curriculum areas to ensure that resources authorized and provincial assessments are accessible and appropriate for students who are blind or visually impaired.
- The production of provincial assessments to be completed by staff positions (braille transcribers) to ensure security and integrity of the provincial exams.
- Present production system moves to becoming a curriculum development component under the *Accessible Resource Plan (2007)*.

#### **Budget -Year One to Three**

- Four FTE increase for braille transcribers (2 FTEs @ \$100,000.00) and other related production staff (1 audio FTE @ \$55,000.00, 1 IT FTE @ \$80,000.00).
- One FTE Teacher of the Visually Impaired (1 FTE @ \$100,000.00).

**Budget: 5 FTEs @ \$435,000.00 per year X 3 years = \$1,305,000.00 + alternate format production contracted out for when the number of Alberta Education authorized resources exceeds in-house production capacity.**

#### **Alberta Education Implications/Recommendations**

Moving alternate format production from responding to school requests for the delivery of learning resources to becoming a component of curriculum development is consistent with Alberta Education's *Accessible Resource Plan (2007)* for all learning resources for students authorized or developed by the Minister to be available in formats to meet the diverse learning needs of Alberta students. Alternative format production would become a component of curriculum development aligning with the department's core business of setting standards. It also allows for more appropriate budget allocation for alternate format production as curriculum development drives production.

It was recommended during the 2005 internal department organizational review that a decision to reorganize the Specialized Services area be deferred until a program review was completed with input from the field.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Alberta Education's Learning Supports and Program Development and Standards Divisions review to determine the most appropriate realignment of the alternate format production areas in recognition of the broader accessibility intent for new curriculum resources.

The *Learning and Teaching Resources Policy* be reviewed and updated to reflect that alternate format production is part of learning resources production and development.

2. Today, the production of approximately 17 provincial exams in braille format involves the use of up to seven contractors at a time. Every time a provincial examination needs to be outsourced, the risk for a security breach of the examination increases. The department allocates 1 FTE for internal braille production of all provincial examinations to eliminate the risk of a security breach to the examination associated with outsourcing.

3. The department allocates 1 FTE for a vision teacher to enable appropriate accommodation at the curriculum development stage and early in the development of provincial examinations. The position would also liaise with the field and other stakeholders.

**Principle 4 Equitable Access to Assistive Technology – Students need individual assistive technology solutions to be successful.**

There is very strong stakeholders support for the special equipment student loan service to be separate from government and for adequate sustainable funding to be provided. Stakeholders felt that all children should have the tools in place to ensure that they are successful learners. There was a consensus around the necessity to provide the appropriate assistive technology to students who are blind or visually impaired to ensure that they have full access to the curriculum and programs of study and to support their independence.

The present system of loaning assistive technology through the LRC is not meeting the needs of students because of limited staffing and ad hoc one-time purchases for the special equipment. Students are placed on waitlists for equipment for extended periods of time, from months (for new purchases) to several years (for upgrades to higher end technology). Turn around of equipment for repair or regular maintenance is taking several months leaving students without the equipment they require. The LRC has not been supported in requests for FTE positions nor a budget to improve this service and thus has been unable to respond appropriately. The one-time funding provided for the purchase of new equipment over the last three years with no staffing has reached the point of not being capable to respond to field requests in any timely manner.

Stakeholders not only want the present mandate of technology available to students who are blind or visually impaired be improved they would also like to see a broader range of technology and software be available to students. They expressed a need for the ability of school authorities to trial equipment to ensure it is a “right fit” for a student. They also outlined the need for technology training and support for students, teachers, parents and other members of the learning team.

**Action Outcomes:**

- **Assistive technology initiative which would clearly outline operating policy for use, access and training (both students and staff).**

- **Provide sustainable assistive technology funding to school authorities so that they can provide solutions that fit for their situations.**
- **Present student resources become the property of the school authorities.**
- **Decision-making of required tools for assistive technology to be linked to the current IPP. Parents should be part of the planning process.**
- **Resource the VRCs for trial loans of assistive technology and to support the training for school authorities.**
- **Budget line for assistive technology to be part of the funding manual for school authorities.**

### **Alberta Education Implications/Recommendations**

A review of the intent of the LRC Special Student Equipment Loaning Service is needed as this has become a program with no budget line item and no full-time staff to coordinate the delivery of 1,333 pieces of equipment (\$2M inventory) to 59 school authorities (across 407 schools). Over the last three years, parent groups meeting with the Ministers of Education to voice their concern have each year received support for the purchase of equipment. In principle, the provision of additional special equipment to students seems to be supported.

Looking across Canada, all but one other one province (Manitoba) provides this service at the school board level either by funding school boards on a per student basis (e.g., Ontario, Saskatchewan), by having a school board/separate board agency host the service through an agreement (B.C. use a host school board/Maritime provinces use a separate board agency), or like Alberta, by delivering it directly (Manitoba).

#### Options for the delivery of this program:

#### **Option 1: Alberta Education continues to deliver the service but addresses stakeholders concerns for a sustainable program.**

Adequately resource the LRC's Special Student Equipment loan service to an additional amount of \$2,995,250.00 plus an additional 4.5 FTEs, supporting the ever greening of equipment, training, trialing of equipment, supporting specialized software applications and funding for new equipment. Today, 1.5 FTEs (\$110,000.00) are allocated (for repair/coordinate purchase/delivery to schools) with ad hoc funding for new purchases based on parent groups annually meeting with the Minister of Education.

Total additional annual funding: \$2,995,250.00 + funding for new purchases/initiatives to deliver the program requested by stakeholders (i.e., expanded to include training, specialized software, braille printers, capacity building with the field). This includes:

1.5 FTEs to coordinate delivery to schools (\$110,000.00)

1 FTE to support coordinating training with the field (\$85,000.00)

.5 FTE to support repair (\$40,000.00)

1 FTE for Information Technology (IT) support systems development/maintenance (online registration, automation for school requests) (\$85,000.00)

1 FTE to support IT configuration/trouble shooting for specialized software installations/upgrades/maintenance (\$85,000.00)

1 FTE for vision consultant (\$100,000.00)  
6 FTEs (\$465,000.00) [of which 4.5 FTEs (\$365,000.00) are new] + \$2,265,250.00 [averages \$3,507.00/student X 646 students) for ever greening/repair of existing equipment] + additional funding for new purchases/initiatives.  
Total new resources: 4.5 FTEs (\$365,000.00) + \$2,265,250.00 (for ever greening existing equipment) + additional funding for new purchases/initiatives including base funding to reflect support for incorporating new functions.

Benefit: Program planning is in place. Parent groups no longer meet with the ministers annually for funding and the department is responsive to school requests. A provincial centralized service is maintained with the department maintaining a significant support service function for the field. Less management for school authorities as the department addresses parent/school staff/vision consultant concerns directly.

Risk: The department is functioning more as a school board by directly delivering this service to schools and working/consulting with parents directly. School level staff, vision consultants and parents will continue to seek more service support from the department rather than from school authorities. The department is moving away from the core business of setting standards by expanding its support directly to the delivery of service to schools rather than expecting school authorities to respond to parents to provide this function. Based on the stakeholder concerns expressed at the workshop, they may not agree that the department can be responsive/nor be adequately resourced to provide a timely/responsive service to schools.

**Option 2: Fund school authorities on a per student basis through a special equipment initiative (SEI) in the funding manual for school authorities.**

The ASBA representative at the November 28, 2007 Stakeholder Workshop supported school boards becoming responsible for assistive technology program for their special needs students.

Ontario's Ministry of Education provided school boards in 2007-2008 with a \$26.4 M for 'Special Equipment Amount' to support students with special needs. Saskatchewan's Ministry of Learning provided school boards with \$2M for assistive technology purchases for K to 12 special needs students.

Alberta Education's proposed 2008-2009 funding request of \$2,265,250.00 is based on \$2,750.00 for low vision and \$6,000.00 for blind student to support ever greening of special equipment (based on the number of students registered with the LRC by education vision specialists).

The intent of the proposal is to assist school authorities in providing equitable access to special equipment for blind or visually impaired students. Today, equipment is delivered based on vision consultants' requests. The distribution pattern observed is that students with frequent access to vision specialist services are accessing more equipment.

School authorities' funding conditions to be considered includes:

1. Must have a current IPP for each student with parent support.
2. Must maintain records for SEI purchases supported by the school authority's special education director.
3. Must use SEI for these students and cannot use SEI funding for purchases eligible under the school authority's technology plan. Examples of eligible funding includes: embossers, brailers, specialized software, service contracts.
4. Must develop and communicate policies on equipment transfers between schools and schools authorities [must provide for transfer for purchases under SEI unless deemed as not practical to move the equipment), use of the equipment including at home and training.
5. Must establish operating policies and procedures on purchase, inventory records, ever greening and repair.
6. Must consider upgrades and refurbishment as an option before replacement.

Benefit: School authorities can plan for the assistive technology needs of students and are accountable to parents for decisions. Parents can expect school authorities to provide their child with assistive technology support. Parent groups no longer request annual meetings with the Minister of Education for assistive technology support. The department sets the standard by determining the outcome to be achieved through the funding initiative. This new funding would be an improvement for school authorities as, to date, no funding is targeted for this service. This increase in funding will be supported by school authorities. Some school authorities may choose to coordinate amongst themselves.

Risk: More administration for school authorities as each authority is responsible for administering their own program.

**Option 3: Fund a host board/agency to deliver the assistive technology loan service.**

Examples of this model are SET-BC (hosted by the Greater Vancouver School Board) and funded by the B.C. Ministry of Education in 2007-2008 to an amount of \$8M for special needs students. Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority is a separate agency funded by the Department of Educations of four Maritimes provinces to deliver support services to blind or visually impaired students.

Benefit: A loaning service providing a central purchasing, repair, training, assessment of students' needs function is provided to school authorities. Not being bound by government requirements, there are opportunities for greater efficiencies through collaborations and partnerships with other organizations including the private sector.

Risk: A host agency will not undertake the function if viewed as not adequately resourced.

**Principal 5 Accountability**

There was a consensus from all stakeholders that everyone has a role to play in educating all students in Alberta. The Alberta Home and School Councils' Association indicated that, "Parents, individuals, and on through school councils have the responsibility of ensuring that the programs of study mandated by Alberta Education are delivered to children. School boards are responsible for providing dollars to make this happen. The

ability of Alberta Education to support school boards in supporting families, principals and teachers by the provision of necessary assistive technology and learning supports is crucial.”

Stakeholders expressed the importance of the *Essential Components of Educational Programming for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired* as a guideline for developing programming. They did express that school authorities need more education and support around what services are necessary to ensure that a quality program that addresses the diverse needs of this population is available in all areas of Alberta. They identified that research is needed to determine if students who are blind or visually across Alberta are attaining successful outcomes. Research is also required around successful attainment of disability specific skills as outlined in the Expanded Core Curriculum identified in the *Essential Components*.

#### **Action Outcomes:**

- **Information bulletin to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the following in supporting these students:**
  - **Department**
  - **School Authorities**
  - **Parents.**
- **Communication plan for stakeholders.**
- **Fund research to determine the key factors in success of the learning outcomes and independence to be coordinated by Provincial Coordinator.**
- **Accountability measures need to be put in place to ensure that this model of service delivery and support being purposed is meeting the needs of students.**

#### **Alberta Education Implications/Recommendations**

1. The *K to 12 Learning System Policy Regulations and Forms Manual* include an Information Bulletin that communicates the roles and responsibilities of the department, school authorities and parents in support of the service delivery model for these students. This includes revising the *Services for Students with Visual Impairments Policy*.
2. The early 2008 Communication Plan is the mechanism to be used to clarify the Minister’s level of support to the Action Outcomes based on the November 2007 stakeholder consultation. This includes an implementation plan with long-term outcomes and performance measures.
3. Alberta Education support research on the success of these students attaining learning outcomes and disability specific skills (Expanded Core Curriculum).